



Rutherford County TDA Coffee Talks December 15, 2015

SESSION 1: Lakeview Restaurant, Rumbling Bald Resort

10:30 am – Noon

Facilitator: Chris Cavanaugh, Magellan Strategy Group

Topics and themes of conversation:

Countywide, how is the stability with the businesses and restaurants right now?

- KidSenses- planning an expansion to engage tweens and teens; whole family involvement
- More restaurants recently opened in Forest City; people are waiting in line for a seats indicating success!
- Lake Lure is perceived as established; market the message, county government and collective community are united on the tourism front. Come through to equestrian center and chimney rock.
- Positive: "Managers & Mayor Meetings" have broken down barriers; Isothermal Community College reaching out countywide and stimulating partnerships
- Chimney Rock offering more of a variety of retail and restaurants and lodging
- Equestrian Center will sustain the economy within Rutherford County

Concerns:

- 46% of the population in 2018 will be over 65 years old; how will that affect our tourism industry?
- How can we drive traffic in January and February to the county?
- Being closed Sun & Mon or for the winter presents a problem
- How are we positioned online? Keyword searches, and information on website.
- Dirty Dancing is a big draw. What else can we put in the county for visitors to see the iconic movies that were filmed in Lake Lure including Last of the Mohicans & Firestarter?
- EDC beginning to embrace tourism as an economic driver, but needs to embrace it more

Ideas/Needs

- Promote lengthy stays and second home (vacation)
- Promote the Riverwalk more
- Need more signs to indicate where visitor attractions are located within the county; wayfinding project is in the works



- Build something iconic for people to photograph themselves at that showcases where they are (ie: bronze statue of the Lake Lift in Dirty Dancing; "Welcome to" signage, etc.); this creates buzz on social media when they post the photos
- Become a regional partner
- Forest City to extend the Thermal Belt Rail Trail
- Maybe make Greenline sewer line concept multi-use and create easements for trails; might get grant money that way
- Create more events to draw people to our area
- Idea to have more of the bigger stakeholders work together to bring in tour groups, motorcycle and car clubs and other large groups of visitors. (ie: RBR, Chimney Rock @ CRSP, Defiant, etc.)
- Chimney Rock and Lake Lure to become a funded WIFI hotspot

SESSION 2: Meeting Room, Forest City

2:00-3:30 pm

Year in review:

- Internet and online presence has been good
- Rumbling Bald Resort indicated that their visitors are staying longer
- Decline in ticket sales at Foundation Performing Arts Center
- Families looking for family activities at the campgrounds
- Not everyone seeing business from the equestrian center spent in the county
- Forest City: new restaurants open made a difference; three times the traffic this year for Hometown Holidays; thankful for TDA's publicity

Needs/Ideas:

- See if equestrian center to bus people to the county to visit
- Better funding at the local level; banks giving people a hard time in Rutherford County
- Less barriers for visitors across the county
- Confidence and risk; need a critical mass of investors to invest in Rutherford County businesses to positive growth (i.e.: need people to invest in downtown Rutherfordton because so much potential there; need to attract lodging, restaurants and retail)